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Case Study Extracted From:

When Quality Assurance Meets Innovation in Higher Education

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NEW MODEL INSTITUTE FOR
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When Quality Assurance Meets Innovation in Higher Education

Case Study of Practice

Connecting Enhancement & Innovation to Assurance through Programme Approval Processes

Helen King¹⁰

1. Context

Bath Spa University is a medium-sized English institution. The innovation presented below took place as part of a quality governance restructure. At BSU and its educational partner institutions, QA is led by the Academic Governance & Quality team which is responsible for L&T-related policies. Processes for the design and approval of new programmes are undertaken in collaboration with Portfolio & Planning team. The development and delivery of policies and processes are also undertaken in collaboration with the new Director of Learning Innovation, Development & Skills and the Teaching Expertise Development team.

2. The innovation

We were keen to streamline our academic governance processes to enable more effective use of time in formal committees and to better connect QA with quality enhancement, particularly with consideration for our increasing number of educational partnerships. In early 2023, a new central learning and teaching unit was created to bring together support for quality enhancement. This Learning Innovation & Skills team, led by the new Director of Learning Innovation Development & Skills, comprises Academic Skills (ASK) plus Schools Technical Services (STS) plus the new Teaching Expertise Development team (TED).

With dedicated support for L&T enhancement now in place through the Director and the TED team, progress was rapidly made to embed support for innovation and enhancement into the QA processes. Feedback from a pedagogic perspective is provided on all new programmes as they are being designed, and on proposed module and programme modifications. In addition, support is offered to programme teams in the form of guides, conversations and workshops on programme and learning design. A set of Education Design Principles were devised to provide a summary expression of our 2030 Education

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Strategy, thereby making it more straightforward for programme design and review to be aligned to the Strategy's objectives.

The major change to processes was in the creation of a Curriculum Approval Panel to replace a much larger committee. The previous committee comprised many of the key stakeholders who had already been involved in earlier stages of design and approval, including Schools-based committees. The new Panel was smaller in its membership but with more targeted expertise including student representation, Pro Vice-Chancellor Academic Planning, Head of Academic Portfolio Development and four academics (from different disciplines) with track records in L&T enhancement and innovation. The panel is serviced by a member of the Academic Governance & Quality team and chaired by the Director of Learning Innovation Development & Skills. Having this Director chair the panel, together with an agenda that includes sharing of good practice, has brought an innovation and enhancement perspective to its work. Examples of good practice are gathered and shared from the programme designs and module and programme modifications; common issues are identified (e.g. optimum number of optional modules, word count equivalencies, authentic assessments); and connections are made to other initiatives and projects. Rather than simply being a 'rubber-stamping' exercise, the panel's meetings are a lively space for debate, learning and sharing, and the approval process has engaged colleagues in more thoughtful and strategically-led design.

3. Outcomes

The differences are outlined above and are a qualitative summary of informal feedback from programme leaders, Curriculum Approval Panel members and the chair of the panel. These new processes have only been in place since the beginning of the 2023-24 academic year, so there are no firmer impact measures at this stage. Anecdotally, we feel that we have achieved the original aim and that the new processes bring together QA and QE in a more meaningful way, enabling enhancement and innovation and the articulation of this in programme specifications that goes beyond a 'tick box' exercise.

4. Takeaways

- Importance of collaboration between QA and quality enhancement teams in all aspects of process and policy development.
- Co-creation of programme design and review to bring a range of expert perspectives (academics, students, QE and QA teams and other professional services).
- Opportunities afforded by having someone responsible for QE chairing the Curriculum Approval (QA) panel.